

Sumitra Manamohan: **BANGALORE TRAILBLAZER**

Female DTM from India helps dyslexic students.

By Julie Bawden-Davis

As a fifth-grader in Bombay, India, Sumitra Manamohan transferred to a more rigorous school, where the former straight-A student struggled. She soon found herself dreading school, but endless encouragement from her mother and father inspired her to finish the year at the top of her class. With this same dedication and persistence, Manamohan has applied herself to the Toastmasters program, becoming the first

after watching *Taare Zameen Par*, an Indian film that tells the story of an academically struggling 8-year-old boy who is sent to boarding school by his parents. There, an art teacher suspects he is dyslexic and helps him reach his potential.

“I was especially impressed with how the boy’s innovative art teacher helped him gain confidence and self-esteem, and I wanted to do the same for dyslexic students in Bangalore

Commanding Respect

Fellow club member Aniket Singh says that Manamohan commands respect, noting that she is often asked to deliver keynote speeches and workshops on a range of topics. “She is an excellent role model for us all, especially the ladies, since Bangalore Toastmasters has predominantly men.”

For Manamohan, gender discrimination has never been an issue because of the way she was raised. “My father worked as a finance manager for an international company and taught me about discipline, passion for work, reading, amicability and, most importantly, gender equality,” she says. “If you think you are equal to a man, you will be treated so.” Manamohan’s father also inspired her in the area of public speaking, as he joined the Indo-American Society in Bombay to hone his public speaking skills after retirement.

Manamohan joined Toastmasters 11 years ago on the recommendation of a college faculty member. “It was love at first sight,” she says. “Toastmasters has made an impact on my attitude and brought out my humor and creativity. Membership has given me confidence, clarity of voice and a knack for impromptu speaking. Now I can address any audience, and I was able to start my own corporate

“I always tell people we use four percent of our potential. Imagine what we can achieve if we tap into the other 96 percent.”

female DTM from Bangalore, India, and one of only seven women in the entire country to earn the honor.

During her journey to DTM status, Manamohan accomplished other firsts, such as becoming the first female president of her home club, the Bangalore Toastmasters, in 2004, and becoming the first female district officer of the then-newly formed District 82, in 2006-2007. She organized and oversaw many projects, including youth leadership programs, an inter-club speech contest to build awareness about road safety, and a Speechcraft group to help dyslexic students.

Manamohan became inspired to form the Speechcraft program

by using the power of expression taught through Toastmasters,” says Manamohan, who held six Speechcraft sessions in the summer of 2010. Nine children between the ages of 6 and 16 enrolled in the program, all with varied learning disabilities related to dyslexia. For Manamohan, the experience proved especially gratifying.

“Many of the children became enthusiastic about speaking,” she says. “It was amazing to see how the Speechcraft program raised their confidence and self-esteem. Seeing the transformation in the children was a deeply satisfying experience that I truly cherish.”



Sumitra Manamohan, DTM

training business, which I've run for the last decade."

Manamohan recommends that every member experience the club president role. "I learned a great deal in the area of team building and leadership skills."

Fan Club

Singh says, "There is something about [Manamohan] that makes new members want to learn about her experience. People always flock to her networking sessions, and since she became a DTM, we've had many guests at the club."

Fellow Toastmaster Jindow Joseph, current president of the Bangalore Toastmasters, is especially impressed with Manamohan's generosity. "Sumitra never says never and has given back to the society in which she lives. The Speechcraft program she did with dyslexic students is an eye-opener for all of us who want to do the Toastmasters programs meaningfully."


On her way to DTM status, Manamohan ran into a few roadblocks, including struggling to obtain

a speaking spot because of her club's 85-person membership. All the while, however, she kept moving forward, pushed by the prospect of being the first woman in Bangalore to obtain her DTM.

Over the years, and especially during her term as president, Manamohan admits to getting so involved with the organization that her husband and two sons expressed concern for what they considered an obsession. "They couldn't wait until my term as president ended, but then something happened to change their perception," she says, recalling what transpired before her last meeting as president. She was crossing the road to buy mementos of appreciation for club officers when she was knocked down by a speeding cab. She had a minor head injury and was taken to the hospital. "My family rushed there, and when the doctors finished examining me and wheeled me into the waiting room, I was greeted by over half of the Toastmasters who attended that night's meeting. My husband and sons were overwhelmed to see the

love that the members had for me and how their camaraderie cheered me up. What's more, the entire bill was waived by the director of the hospital, who was a club member."

No doubt Manamohan's philosophy has something to do with her popularity. "I strongly believe if you feel something can happen, it will," she says. "It's all in the mind. I always tell people we use four percent of our potential. Imagine what we can achieve if we tap into the other 96 percent.

"With effective communication you can do wonders. Let your actions make a difference to people and your words will touch and open their hearts." 

For more information about the Bangalore Toastmasters Club, visit bangaloretoastmasters.org.in. Or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/62487726282.

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